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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM: BLOC LEADERS  
RAISE THE STAKES

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

Ref: Belgrade 530

¶1. (SBU) Summary: PM Djukanovic stated he would resign and call early parliamentary elections if independence gets fewer votes than continued union. Union bloc leader Bulatovic replied he would leave politics if the union is dissolved. Nascent political party Group for Changes (GZP) leader Medojevic predicted a result in the "gray zone" of 50 to 55 percent for independence - to the benefit of GZP's political ambitions. The first of six weekly televised debates was held April 10, with Djukanovic and SDP leader Krivokapic versus Bulatovic and NS party leader Popovic. The judiciary filed charges against those involved in the "Zeta Film." End summary.

Djukanovic Raises the Stakes  
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¶2. (U) PM Djukanovic stated April 6, in an interview carried by Reuters that he would resign and call early parliamentary elections if independence gets fewer votes than continued union. He added however that he expects independence to get the needed 55 percent of the vote. Parliament's mandate expires in October this year. Comment: Few observers expect that more votes will be cast for continued State Union than for independence; the question is whether independence will get the legally required 55 percent of all valid votes cast. End comment.

Bulatovic Calls  
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¶3. (U) Not to be outdone, leader of the pro-Union bloc and of the Socialist People's Party (SNP) Predrag Bulatovic subsequently told the press that he would "leave politics" if independence was not rejected. Joined by his bloc partners, Bulatovic asserted at a press conference that the Union would get 180,000 or even 200,000 votes, including 10,000 disaffected voters from Djukanovic's own Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) - 46 to 51 percent of expected turnout. Comment: The parties that now make up the pro-Union bloc have not polled 170,000 votes since the 1997 election when Djukanovic broke with Milosevic - and the SNP split from the DPS. End comment.

Group for Changes Plans for Gray Zone  
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¶4. (SBU) Group for Changes (GZP) leader Nebojsa Medojevic told Consulate April 10 that he expects independence to get 53 percent of the vote, with turnout high at 84 percent. He

says a significant number of voters who back independence will vote no, out of hatred for Djukanovic, and if Djukanovic resigned before the vote, independence could easily get 60 percent support. Saying that "no party has prepared for the gray zone except the GZP," he said that he had advised the GoS not to talk to PM Djukanovic in case of a gray zone result, but to wait for the Montenegrin parliamentary elections. He would then campaign against Djukanovic on the platform that the GoM's corruption and dishonesty led to the loss. Medojevic snidely added that "Putin has told Deripaska to end (financial) support to the independence campaign," referring to the Russian oligarch who in 2005 purchased the Podgorica Aluminum Factory (KAP), the single largest component of Montenegro's GDP (12 percent of GDP in 2004). Comment: The GZP has almost completed its transformation from NGO to party. While Medojevic has good sources and may be correct in his prediction, it may also be wishful thinking because a gray zone would be the result that would most benefit his new party and its central platform: for independence, against Djukanovic. End comment.

#### The "Duel" Commences

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15. (U) The first in a series of weekly televised debates between independence and union sides was carried April 10 on Montenegro public television (TVCG1). The first two-hour discussion was between PM Djukanovic and SDP leader Ranko Krivokapic for independence, and Bulatovic and NS party leader Predrag Popovic for union. The debate was held without excessive tension, although Bulatovic and Popovic focused more on the alleged corruption affecting the GoM and on Djukanovic than on the benefits of staying in Union with Serbia. Their attacks led Djukanovic to riposte

BELGRADE 00000575 002 OF 002

whether they would tell their voters to support independence if he were to resign as PM. A poll conducted by an local NGO showed that 80 percent of Montenegro watched the debate, and 67.5 percent came away with a favorable impression of the pro-Independence bloc, compared to only 17.5 percent with a favorable impression of the pro-Union bloc (respondents could answer that they had a favorable impression of both blocs). Djukanovic left the strongest impression (51.5 percent); Bulatovic the weakest (8.1 percent). The series will run through the May 21 vote, with varying participants.

#### Charges over "Zeta Film"

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16. (U) The prosecutor responsible for the "Zeta Film" case (ref), involving the purported buying of votes by the DPS, caught secretly on film, has recommended that charges be brought against the participants. The two DPS activists and the suspended policeman will be charged with violating the freedom of voting and causing disorder. Maximum sentence is three years imprisonment.

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